

First annual report – Network meetings

URKRAFT – Sweden

Reporting period: January 2023 - December 2023

Overview

The first annual report concerning the Italian network meetings covers the period from January to December 2023. In the previous months, at the end of 2022, the Reality Check project started, and the first phase was used to draft clear guidelines on how to set up the regional networks in each country, and how to lead them afterwards.

Introduction: Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the network is to bring together company representatives, organizations and education providers in Skellefteå to discuss and develop earlier ways of how school and working life can be more closely linked to each other. The goal is to create better conditions for students to gain early insight into working life conditions, professional roles and skills needs, and to give employers the opportunity to contribute to the future supply of skills.

The background is the clear challenge that many actors face: the education system and working life often function as parallel worlds that are only limited in scope during the students' schooling. Today, compulsory school has few structured elements of working life orientation, while upper secondary school mainly offers one-year internships in certain programs and courses. At the same time, employers express that it is difficult to allocate time and resources to offer more and more different interventions. This creates a gap that the network wants to help reduce.

By bringing together actors from different sectors in recurring network meetings, we create a platform for the exchange of experiences, joint learning and idea development. The work aims to promote a long-term structure where school and working life interact in a more systematic and sustainable way.

Network and members

The Swedish network is composed of a total of 10 members from Skellefteå. The network includes representatives of educational organisations and companies, as well as freelance professionals. The professional profiles involved are therefore teachers, employers, employees, career counsellors, and trainers. A network composed of different stakeholders was seen as the best basis for discussing RealityChecks from different perspectives, resulting in a broader and more comprehensive view on new possible forms of cooperation between the school and the world of work.

1. June 15th 2023, first network meeting, a gathering of interested parties, provide information of Reality Check project, its goals and make an inventory of needs and interests of the stakeholders present.

2. September 4th 2023, working meeting with the finalized network: to introduce each other, investigate members' interests, needs and motivation, brainstorm summary of inputs emerged in the previous meeting, draft of idea for a possible first initiative (RealityCheck).
3. December 14th 2023, operational meeting to recap on first RealityCheck, collect ideas for the next initiatives, divide tasks for the organisation of the first RealityChecks that will be developed and tested during spring/summer of 2024.

First network meeting

Date & Time: June 15th 2023 – 14:30-16:30

N. of participants: 9

Description/minutes

First Network Meeting – Spring

The first network meeting of the year took place in the spring and focused on mapping the current situation. The participants represented both the business community, organizations and representatives from both primary and secondary schools and adult education. The discussion highlighted the challenges of connecting school and working life more closely. The school's focus on curriculum and national goals is sometimes perceived to clash with the working life's need for flexibility and practical insight for students.

A central conclusion from the meeting was that working life orientation often occurs late, mainly in upper secondary school, while primary school students rarely have any direct contact with working life. All participants agreed that this is a lost opportunity – there is great value in introducing students to the different parts of working life early on, both to arouse curiosity and to give them a realistic picture of future career choices.

Key decisions & Future milestones

- Decisions on meetings rules, timeframes, roles
- In the next meeting, draft of first idea for a RealityCheck is planned
- Date for the next meeting: 4th of September 2023.

Second network meeting

Date & Time: September 4th 2023 – 14:30-16:30

N. of participants: 8

Description/minutes

The second network meeting had the theme “From words to action”. Here, good examples from other municipalities and projects where sustainable forms of cooperation have been created were presented. The discussions revolved around possible models for adapting these to Skellefteå’s local conditions with extremely low unemployment linked to the green transition.

Employers highlighted the importance of finding flexible ways to get involved – for example through shorter visits, digital presentations or joint days/job fairs – instead of just internships. School representatives also highlighted the need for clear structures and a division of responsibilities so that the efforts can be implemented within the framework of the school’s operations. Urkraft, who represents the RealityCheck project, will be the facilitator for the upcoming activities and both employers and school staff highlighted the need for an external facilitator initially to be able to carry out these activities. Neither schools nor companies have the opportunity to develop this on their own.

Key decisions & Future milestones

- Agreement on a first idea of different RealityChecks for lower-secondary students and aimed at discovering the labour market
- Agreement on the need of a division of roles and tasks between members for the RealityChecks draft and implementation
- Date for the next meeting: 14th of December 2023.



Third network meeting

Date & Time: December 14th 2023 – 14:30-16:00

N. of participants: 9

Description/minutes

The third meeting during the winter was an opportunity to summarize the year's discussions and to concretize the next steps. The participants expressed a common desire to continue the work, despite the challenges that exist. An important insight was that even small efforts can make a big difference, especially if they are carried out repeatedly and in an organized manner.

The meeting resulted in a common ambition to develop pilot initiatives in the coming years where both primary and secondary schools will have the opportunity to test new forms of cooperation via our RealityChecks. The importance of making the benefits visible for both parties was also emphasized: the students will gain increased motivation and working life knowledge, while employers will have the opportunity to meet future employees early on.

Conclusions and recommendations

During the year, the network has established a common understanding of the need to link school and working life more closely. The three network meetings have shown that:

There is a strong will from both schools, companies and organisations to develop cooperation.

The challenges lie primarily in structural differences: the school's focus on curriculum and the employers' time constraints.

The primary school is a particularly neglected arena when it comes to working life orientation. There is great potential here to develop new methods and activities.

Small and flexible initiatives can be a viable way forward, rather than just internships in upper secondary school.

Although concrete new models have not yet been fully implemented, the network has laid a solid foundation for continued work during the year. We have identified common challenges, brought together actors around a shared vision and created a platform where ideas can be developed further.

This is long-term work that requires perseverance. At the same time, the results of the year are clear: we have established a strong collaborative structure and a common will to continue developing concrete solutions. In the long term, this means that more students in Skellefteå will have the opportunity to encounter working life at an early age, which strengthens their motivation, prepares them for future career choices and contributes to a more sustainable supply of skills in the region.